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ABSTRACT

Project Earlybird assists at-risk students to anticipate the upcoming classwork and be ready for the lessons when the teacher presents them. The project is a before/after school program in which elementary students in grades 2 through 5 are given extra help with reading, mainly using computers. Elements of the program include: (1) raising students' self-esteem by allowing them special privileges with computers; (2) establishing an informal atmosphere as students learn new vocabulary, learn to use the word processor, practice keyboarding, and make banners and signs for themselves and the faculty; (3) keeping track of reading progress using a computer management system; (4) sending parents informational newsletters; (5) using a teacher-made series of home activities; (6) using volunteer senior citizen and grandparent listeners; and (7) having "celebrity" readers read to students. Project Earlybird prepares students for their lessons rather than "repairing" them with remediation after tests are taken. (A copy of a 3-panel brochure describing the program is attached.) (RS)

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Jean Groves Merrell

LET'S PREPARE - NOT REPAIR - OUR AT RISK STUDENTS

Teachers in the one-room school worried about the child who, for one reason or another, did not learn as quickly as others. The same child of today also may be having trouble learning- for one reason or another- and schools across the nation have become interested in developing programs for them- the child who now is known as the "at risk". For years, Federal monies, state grants, and local funding have promoted programs for the purpose of giving assistance to those who need extra help with school work. Such programs as Title I/Chapter I or Compensatory Education, have been successful in providing assistance for millions of disadvantaged children for the past twenty-five years.

Many of these assistance programs stressed the same approach and used the same techniques that the child had been exposed to in the regular classroom. Students were given more of the same methods, same lessons, and same materials. In these programs, students were tested, diagnosed for strengths and weaknesses, then remediated in skill areas which showed a need. Using the extra materials such as special skill workbooks, phonics charts, sight word cards and lab sets, the teachers' intent was to "remediate" the students - giving assistance AFTER finding out what the needs were. The time frame consisted of remediation "after the fact".

However, if we can assist the at-risk students to anticipate the upcoming classwork and be ready for the skills when the teacher presents them, they may be able to keep up with classmates and be a "step a-head" rather than behind. We can PREPARE them for their lessons rather than try to REPAIR the skills after test-taking.

PROJECT EARLYBIRD

One such plan with the purpose of classroom preparation was an innovative before/after school program in which elementary students in grades 2-5 were given extra help with reading mainly through the use of computer technology. The program, called PROJECT EARLYBIRD, used a non-traditional approach to give reading assistance to students identified by their teachers as "at risk", those with below average reading performance or those who were economically deprived.

Because the emphasis was on preparation for classwork rather than remediation, both correlation and cooperation were a necessity: (1) correlation of activities and materials to the basal reading series that was to be used in the classroom and (2) cooperation between staff members who worked with the students. The plan was organized with consideration of some of the known contributors to success in school- motivation, parent involvement, and practice. The plan also incited the cooperation of the school, home and community.

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** AT SCHOOL **

I. MOTIVATION-

* COMPUTERS- The computer was used as the greatest motivational factor to interest students in reading. Students enrolled in the program were allowed to work in the computer room and were taught to use computer systems with related software as a learning tool for themselves and to make materials for their teachers. Being allowed these special priviliges with computers bolstered their self-esteem. As extra time was spent with computers, they became more experienced, self- confident, and able to give computer assistance to others.

* SPECIAL INVITATION- Students who qualified for the program were invited to participate either in the morning while waiting for school to start or in the afternoon while waiting for busses to take them home. Students were identified as members of the PROJECT EARLYBIRD COMPUTER CLUB by showing special permits or identification cards which released them from the teacher on duty.

* ATTITUDE- The atmosphere for learning was informal, loosely structured and non-threatening. Students were free to accomplish what they could, not pushed to what they could not do. However, students were very aware of their daily purpose- that of preparing for their classroom lesson or upcoming lessons and tests. Materials were those far related to everyday classroom tools such as pencils, paper, ditto sheets, or workbooks. Working equipment took the form of computers, printers, overhead transparancies, gameboards and the such. Motivation was high with charts being kept and rewards given for success on tests taken in the classroom.

* COMPUTE-A-WORD- This system was developed to correlate to the classroom vocabulary and consisted of a workable bulletin board, a box of basal lists, correlated software and take-home materials. Using the computer systems, each student previewed new vocabulary by: (1) playing a word game which uses context sentences with correlated vocabulary (2) making flash cards for their classroom teacher or to take home for study (3) typing and printing hide-a-word puzzles containing story vocabulary for their class (4) typing & printing Bingo cards containing vocabulary and (5) taking home vocabulary lists and tachistoscopes.

Intermediate students in grades four and five learned to use a word processor, practice keyboarding, and make banners/signs for themselves and the faculty.

* COMPUTER MANAGEMENT SYSTEM- The reading progress of all students in the school was kept with a computer management system which scored and graded basal reading tests for classroom teachers. Earlybird students were allowed to print out their own individual status information for each test so that they could be aware of their own successes on each skill. Earlybird students were rewarded for passing scores on skills that they had perfected.

Students were made aware of their own learning styles and strengths through the use of a Reading Skills Inventory which was given via computer input. After results were printed, individual learning styles were discussed with the teacher and aide.

** AT HOME **

II. PARENT INVOLVEMENT-

Several types of materials were developed and provided for parents to use while helping their child with most of them basal-corrrelated to the reading program at school.

* TAKE-HOME ACTIVITIES- A teacher-made series of home activities for parent assistance was available for students to take home. The HOME*AID HELPER SERIES included:

1. HOME*AID HELPER PULL-UPS, a series of hand-held tachistoscopes with different patterns for each month, helped students review the same weekly basal word list used on the computer at school that day. Parents could help with preparation and preview of words that would be encountered in class.
2. HOME*AID MAGIC SLATES, a series of patterned marker boards using lamination and marker pens which were taken home to practice writing new words.
3. HOME*AID SIGHT WORD COLORING GAMES, take-homes which helped primary students learn instant words.

* PARENT INFORMATIONAL NEWSLETTERS- Monthly informational newsletters were developed for helping parents to work with their child at home. One called READING-A FAMILY AFFAIR contained research articles, a question and answer column called" Dear Teacher", and family learning activities. The newsletter, which was distributed to parents of the whole student body, was especially beneficial to parents of the at risk students.

* PARENT VOLUNTEERS- A Parent Volunteeer Program contributed to the success of the program. Many parents worked at school daily to prepare materials, assist with small groups of childrren, or listen to individual students read aloud from their basal reading lesson.

* PROJECT SELF-ESTEEM- Parent and community volunteers presented lessons on self-esteem to classrooms on a weekly basis under the direction of the elementary guidance counselor. The project was successful in helping many students, including the at-risk, to boost their self esteem.

** IN THE COMMUNITY **

III. READING PRACTICE

THE READ-ALOUD HANDBOOK author, Jim Trelease, who shows how one can raise a reader and bring your family closer at the same time, has influenced many individuals to implemented read-aloud programs. We also believed in the importance of reading aloud, and started several paractice reading projects for this purpose.

The reading projects were designed to give practice in reading aloud and to show that reading is a special pleasure for many people. Our projects involved volunteers from the community who assisted students on a regular weekly or monthly basis and others who volunteered for special occasions.

* SENIOR CITIZEN LISTENERS- Volunteers from several senior groups: Senior Citizens Center, the AARP (Association of Retired Persons), RSVP (Retired Senior Volunteers Program), and the local Retired Teachers Association scheduled regular listening times for young students. Students who needed extra help in reading were paired on a one-to-one basis with seniors who listened to them read aloud from their basal reader story. Both the seniors and the young students looked forward to monthly READ-TO-ME DAYS when both ages received individual attention from each other.

* CELEBRITY READERS- For a total school project, leaders of the community accepted invitations to participate in "I LOVE TO READ WEEK", including an attorney, pediatrician, school superintendent, school board member, principal, fireman, and policeman. Each one influenced many students as they shared their favorite book and read aloud to different age groups and classes.

* GRANDPARENTS' DAY- Many grandparents of the student body accepted invitations to join classroom reading groups and listen to their grandchildren read with their classmates in a typical school day. Children looked forward to seeing their own families interested in their schoolwork.

SUMMARY

Many of those whom we have identified as at risk students can be helped with early intervention programs such as this one if we can move the time frame of our programs to INTERVENT and give assistance BEFORE the classroom lessons begin. An emphasis on preparation can help students be a "step-ahead" and ready for up-coming activities rather than lagging behind their classmates. We can PREPARE them for their lessons rather than REPAIR with remediation after tests are taken. As a reading specialist with twenty eyars experience, I have found that reviewing a skill AFTER it was missed serves no purpose. By them it is too late for several reasons. One, students do not care about correcting what they have missed, which inhibits the learning of the skill. Two, they won't remember it until the next time that it is presented- a time which is usually months away.

As teachers, we can cooperate and correlate, developing programs to help prepare students for classroom work. We can all work together for the same cause- the benefit of our students we are naming "the at risk".

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5.

HANDOUT

WORKING TOGETHER FOR BETTER READING

BY JEAN GROVES MERRELL

SCHOOL / HOME / COMMUNITY INTERACTION

Research has shown that there are several contributors to success in school. Among them are: motivation and self-esteem, parent involvement, and practice and repetition. Utilizing this information, I developed the following projects to promote better reading for elementary students at West Broadway School. Many of the activities are part of a plan that combined several projects for remediation in Chapter I. The plan requires the cooperation of the school, parents, and community, as well as the correlation of reading materials.

At-school activities which bolster self-esteem include projects using the computer as a motivational learning tool. All materials, including commercial software, are correlated to the basal reader and adapted to students' needs. **Compute-a-Word** is a system that utilizes the computer as a tool for introducing vocabulary prior to regular classroom basal reading. In this system a large bulletin board, which displays all basal story titles and a personalized movable computer character, keeps up with the progress of students as they read stories. Each student previews vocabulary with correlated software and with word pullups, a teacher-made tachistoscope (viewer), and their word list from a vocabulary box. **Project Earlybird** is a before/after school program for at-risk students. While waiting for bells or buses, students use computers to develop word processing, keyboarding, and vocabulary skills.

At-home activities assist parents in helping their child with schoolwork. **Home-aid Helper Pullups** are a series of hand-held tachistoscopes which help parents review new vocabulary with the child. **Home-aid helper magic slates** are a series of marker boards using monthly theme patterns and lamination that are made for school and home. Students practice writing words on the boards with markers that erase with tissues. **Home-aid helper sight word coloring games** feature instant words for young students to take home. **Reading: A Family Affair** newsletters provide monthly information for parents. They include research articles, a question and answer column, and some family learning activities. **Pointers for Parents** are informational brochures on subjects such as how much help to give, echo reading, and using computers.

Several projects that provide practice and repetition involve community volunteers. **Senior Volunteers** from the local senior citizens center, the retired teachers organizations, and other such groups listen to young students read twice a month. **Celebrity readers** brings community leaders into classrooms to read aloud during **I Love to Read Week**. Students enjoy hearing attorneys, doctors, policemen, etc., share their favorite books. **Grandparents' Day** is a program in which grandparents of the students join classroom reading groups and listen to their grandchildren read from basal readers.

For further information on these activities, contact

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